

Edwards: VA Outlines Plan to Reopen Benefits to 265,000 Middle Income Vets

Historic VA Funding Approved by 110th Congress Made Expansion Possible

(Washington, DC) -- U.S. Representative Chet Edwards announced that the Department of Veterans Affairs has briefed his subcommittee on their plan to reopen the VA health care and benefits system to middle income veterans known as Priority 8 veterans. In 2008, Edwards authored the provision directing the VA to expand benefits to approximately 265,000 new veterans who have been excluded from the VA system since 2003.

“Reopening the doors of the VA system to veterans who have earned these benefits sends a clear message that we honor and respect their service and sacrifice to country,” said Edwards, Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs. “This needed expansion of VA benefits to middle income veterans is just one example of how millions of veterans will benefit from the historic funding increases of the last two years.”

Priority 8 veterans were initially blocked from enrollment into the VA system in January 2003 if their income exceeded approximately \$30,000 annually. Edwards last year authored the \$375 million provision to expand enrollment of Priority 8 veterans by 10% under the fiscal year 2009 Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill, which became law on September 29th. The Department of Veterans Affairs today announced funding will be formally disbursed to VA hospitals and clinics later this month in order to implement the new enrollment plan by June.

“One of the untold stories of the 110th Congress was the historic \$16.3 billion increase in funding for veterans health care and benefits. That was a larger increase in two years than the previous 12 years combined in Congress. Our veterans earned and deserved every dime.”

Edwards is Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs.

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